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SYRIA-LEBANON: Reaction to US Airstrikes

Damascus said yesterday it will continue to fire on US reconnaissance missions overflying Syrian positions in Lebanon. [redacted]

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In Damascus, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam told the US Ambassador that his government is concerned over reports of increased US-Israeli cooperation in the region. Khaddam implied Damascus believes that the US and Israel have reached an agreement for joint military pressure against Syria. [redacted]

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Khaddam offered to guarantee that no forces within Syrian-controlled territory would fire on MNF units if the US agreed to stop the overflights. He also said he would personally urge Lebanese opposition factions to agree to a firm cease-fire. [redacted]

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In Beirut the US Embassy reports that pro-Syrian groups and some moderate Muslims have condemned the US airstrikes against Syrian military positions as the first indication of closer US-Israeli cooperation in Lebanon. Sunni Prime Minister Wazzan characterized the attacks as an escalation of the fighting in Lebanon, but he stopped short of outright condemnation. [redacted]

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An official TASS statement and remarks by Leonid Zamyatin, head of the Central Committee's International Information Department, yesterday gave Moscow's most authoritative reaction so far. TASS suggested US-Israeli coordination in the strikes and expressed Soviet "solidarity" with Lebanon, Syria, and other Arab states. Zamyatin, at a Moscow press conference, said the USSR would provide moral and material support to Arab countries and predicted these states would repel US and Israeli aggression. [redacted]

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There has been no significant Soviet military reaction to the US airstrikes. [redacted]

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Comment: Although the Syrians apparently want to avoid chances for military confrontation with the US, they see the US as acting in concert with Israel to limit Syrian influence in Lebanon. Damascus's offer to prevent fire on MNF units from "Syrian-controlled territory" is disingenuous in its implication that Syria has no role in Druze, Shia, and Palestinian attacks on the MNF from south of the Syrian zone. This is clearly not the case. [redacted]

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The Soviets are trying to maintain their credibility with Syria and other Arab states by showing diplomatic and moral support for Damascus. Nevertheless, Moscow continues to avoid committing itself to any military response or to any signal that Damascus can expect Soviet intervention in a US-Syrian clash in Lebanon. [redacted]

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USSR: Press Conference on INF Deployments

High-ranking officials at a press conference in Moscow yesterday reaffirmed General Secretary Andropov's statement of 24 November that INF talks could not be conducted unless NATO shows a readiness to return to the situation existing before its INF deployments. [redacted]

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First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko asserted that this readiness must take the shape of "deeds" and not just words, but he stopped short of demanding withdrawal of US missiles as a precondition. Chief of the General Staff Ogarkov said that Soviet counterdeployments would be comparable to NATO's and would be "kept within those limits that are dictated by the actions of the NATO countries." [redacted]

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Ogarkov emphasized that the Soviet weapons deployed in the "oceans and seas" against US territory will be as effective as the US weapons deployed in Europe, especially in terms of "flight time to their targets." He later asserted that the accuracy of cruise missiles and their ability, when flying low, to avoid detection make them "first strike" weapons comparable to ballistic missiles. He stated that the "operational-tactical missiles of greater range" to be deployed in East Germany and Czechoslovakia would reach most of NATO's new INF missile bases. [redacted]

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Comment: Korniyenko's statement might imply that a reduction in or a freeze on NATO's deployments at some future date would be sufficient for the talks to resume. Ogarkov's rationale for considering cruise missiles as "first strike" weapons probably will serve as the basis for a Soviet assertion that cruise missiles in submarines off US coasts pose a threat to the US analogous to that posed the USSR by NATO's INF missiles. [redacted]

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Ogarkov's remarks about the range of missiles in East Germany and Czechoslovakia are consistent with the deployment of the 925-kilometer-range SS-12/22, which can reach targets as far away as the US cruise missile bases in the UK. His remarks about counterdeployments being kept within the limits dictated by NATO's deployments suggest that the size and pace of the Soviet military response will correspond closely to NATO's deployments. [redacted]

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NATO: Defense Ministers Meet

The Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence and Allied concerns over armaments cooperation and "out-of-area" responsibilities are likely to dominate Allied discussions when NATO Defense Ministers meet today and tomorrow in Brussels. []

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The US Embassy in Athens says Prime Minister Papandreou intends to raise the Turkish Cypriot declaration and the issue of NATO exercises in the Aegean. He will not propose formal language on the Cyprus issue for the communique but will restate the case for including the Greek island of Lemnos in NATO exercises. []

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With NATO INF deployments under way, the Defense Ministers plan to devote particular attention to achieving conventional force improvement goals endorsed by NATO last year. According to the US Mission to NATO, several of the Allies, particularly the West Germans, may seek US assurances that armaments programs exploiting new weapons technologies will involve West European industry. []

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Comment: Continuing Greek-Turkish disputes may resurface over language contained in a study on the impact on NATO of operations in Southwest Asia. In addition, several of the Allies, including the Dutch, Germans, Norwegians, and Italians, may urge a reassessment of US plans for its rapid deployment force. Some may argue that resource constraints will prevent them from adequately compensating for diversion of US forces from NATO. []

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Papandreou's statements on the Greek-Turkish dispute at previous NATO meetings were not well received, and the Allies are increasingly testy about the continuing intrusions of this bilateral problem into NATO consultations. Papandreou may believe that the Ministers should condemn the Turkish Cypriot action, but a request for a collective judgment is likely to fail. []

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UK-US: Foreign Policy Differences Highlighted

Prime Minister Thatcher is emphasizing that the UK has foreign policy positions that are distinct from those of the US. []

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The British have expressed concern that the recent US-Israeli accord will not improve prospects for reconciliation in Lebanon but could increase the risks for their contingent on the Multinational Force. The US Embassy in London warns that a US-Israeli "alliance" would be likely to cause the UK to disassociate itself from US policy in the Middle East and to renew its interest in an EC peace initiative. Moreover, according to British officials, Thatcher has rejected advice not to reply to a letter from General Secretary Andropov criticizing INF deployments because she favors "enhanced dialogue" with the East. []

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Comment: Thatcher's actions do not represent a shift in foreign policy priorities, and the Prime Minister remains a steadfast supporter of the "special relationship" between the US and the UK. Nevertheless, the exigencies of British politics and the differences with the US over Middle East matters apparently have persuaded her that a more distinctly British approach to some issues will be helpful politically. []

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The British are particularly concerned that close association with the US will put their interests in the Middle East at greater risk, especially if the Arabs believe the US and Israel are now open allies against Syria. In addition, differences over Grenada, the pending US recertification of Argentina for arms sales, and warnings from some MPs that British lives are at risk in Belize and Lebanon for US and not British interests have encouraged Thatcher to play up her own foreign policy role. She probably sees this as a way of deflecting criticism that she has placed too much emphasis on her relationship with the current US Government. []

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The Prime Minister's trip to Hungary early next year, the prospect of additional trips to Warsaw Pact countries, and the decision to respond to Andropov without polemics all are being used to show that London's dealings with the East are not frozen. She wants to underscore the point, during a time when US-Soviet relations are troubled. []

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POLAND: Walesa More Conciliatory

Lech Walesa's call yesterday for an end to some Western sanctions against Poland coincided with new regime press attacks on both him and the sanctions. He told Western journalists that he expects a renewal of antiregime demonstrations but opposes them.

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Comment: Walesa may be trying to appear more conciliatory in order to counter regime criticism and to encourage the government to negotiate with him. He is likely to develop his new position in a promised speech on 16 December commemorating slain shipyard workers and outline a plan for future action, but the regime probably will not respond favorably. Although Solidarity militants will be disappointed over Walesa's call, some people will welcome his appeal for Western aid because they are concerned about expected price increases and the future of the economy. Walesa's change of heart may reflect the influence of church officials, many of whom have privately called for an easing of sanctions.

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WARSAW PACT: Meeting of Defense Ministers

Warsaw Pact Defense Ministers, who began their semiannual meeting in Sofia yesterday, probably will concentrate on issues related to Western INF deployments and Eastern countermeasures. Moscow presumably has been disappointed by East European responses to its previous efforts to enlist support for its position on the INF issue. Defense Minister Ustinov and Marshal Kulikov arrived in Sofia early—over the weekend—and they plan separate talks with the Bulgarians after the Warsaw Pact meeting.

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Comment: The early arrival of the Soviet representatives probably indicates an effort to secure better East European cooperation on INF at the meeting in Sofia. The most divisive issue probably will be the Soviet demand that the East Europeans increase their defense expenditures to cover the cost of military countermeasures to NATO's INF deployments. East German and Czechoslovak officials already are expressing concern about the costs associated with the stationing of 925-kilometer-range SS-22s in their countries.

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